

# Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood against artery walls. It is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and recorded as two numbers — systolic pressure (as the heart beats) over diastolic pressure (as the heart relaxes between beats). Both numbers are important. (See box below)

Blood pressure rises and falls throughout the day. When it stays elevated over time, it's called high blood pressure. High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard and the force of its blood flow can harm arteries. High blood pressure often has no warning signs or symptoms. Once it occurs, it usually lasts a lifetime. Uncontrolled, it can lead to heart and kidney disease and stroke.

## BLOOD PRESSURE LEVELS FOR ADULTS\*

CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC+		DIASTOLIC+	RESULT
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80	Good for you! Your blood pressure could be a problem. If you also have diabetes, see your doctor.
Prehypertension	120-139	or	80-90	
Hypertension	140 or higher	or	90 or higher	You have high blood pressure. Ask your doctor or nurse how to control it.

\* For adults ages 18 and older who are not on medicine for high blood pressure and do not have a short-term serious illness. Source: *The Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure*; NIH Publication Number 03-5230, National High Blood Pressure Education Program, May 2003.

+ If systolic and diastolic pressures fall into different categories, overall status is the higher category.

## To prevent or control blood pressure take these steps:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Be physically active
- Follow a healthy eating plan, which includes foods lower in salt and sodium
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation

**The higher blood pressure rises above normal, the greater the health risk. If you have high blood pressure and are prescribed medication, take it as directed.**

Cardiovascular Health Program

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